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Conference Abstract

Freshwater Biodiversity of the Eastern Highlands of Zimbabwe: Assessing Conservation Priorities Using Primary Species-Occurrence Data

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Abstract

The Eastern Highlands of Zimbabwe is a biodiversity hotspot that forms part of the Eastern Afromontane region, which has seen an increase in human activities such as agriculture, illegal mining, and introduction of invasive species. These anthropogenic activities have had negative environmental consequences including land degradation and water pollution, which have negatively impacted on the quality of aquatic habitats and biodiversity in the region. The region harbours several freshwater species of conservation interest whose numbers and distribution are little known. We also do not know the impacts of the ongoing human activities and threats on the local wetland biodiversity and the integrity of the ecosystem in the region. The relevant data on the wetland biodiversity from previous studies and surveys is also not readiliy available to guide poliies and conservation efforts in this region.

With the aid of the Biodiversity Information for Development (BID) program sponsored by the Global Biodiversity Information Facility (GBIF) and the European Union (EU), a project titled 'Freshwater Biodiversity of the Eastern Highlands of Zimbabwe: Assessing Conservation Priorities Using Primary Species-Occurrence Data' has mobilized and digitized over 2,000 occurrence records on freshwater biodiversity, with a focus on fish, invertebrates, amphibians and bird species in the region, since October 2017. The project

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also makes use of biodiversity informatics tools such as ecological niche modelling, to identify the important sites for conservation of the freshwater biodiversity in this region. The outputs will help to show policy makers, wildlife managers, researchers and conservationists where to target resources and conservation efforts. This will also help protect the biodiversity that still existsin the unprotected wetlands of the Eastern Highlands of Zimbabwe and that could be lost to human activities such as clearing for agriculture.

Keywords

Freshwater Biodiversity, Eastern Highlands of Zimbabwe, Biodiversity Informatics, Ecological Niche Modelling

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